

Audio Podcast Script

Principal Evaluation

Tony Milanowski and Patrick Schuermann

Interviewer: This is Cortney Rowland with the Center for Educator Compensation Reform and I'm joined now by Tony Milanowski with the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Patrick Schuermann from Vanderbilt University. Patrick is the director of Technical Assistance for CECR and Tony is one of our TA providers. Welcome to you both.

Tony: Thank you Courtney.

Patrick: Thank you Courtney.

Interviewer: At the annual grantee meeting, you co-presented a session on principal evaluation and discussed some of the challenges of evaluating principals in an alternative compensation system. Tell us a little more about those challenges.

Tony: Well, I can talk about four. First of all, evaluating principals is a challenge, because of the complexity of the principal's job. Principals are often instructional leaders, disciplinarians, business managers and social workers all on the same day.

Districts also tend to send multiple messages to principals about what to focus on. The evaluation system may reward behaviors or actions, like building a professional community or developing a school vision, but then the accountability department emphasizes student achievement, the finance department threatens dire consequences for not staying within the budget, and the superintendent calls to ask why parents are complaining about the bus schedule. It's easy for principals to ignore the evaluation system as they jump from priority to priority.

Third, how you assess a principal's performance can depend upon the context. The actions and results you might expect from a principal in her first year of trying to turn around a struggling school may be very different from those that you'd expect from her colleague who has run a successful elementary school for several years.

Fourth, there is a tradition of principal autonomy. In some school districts there's an implicit assumption that principals should be left alone to handle the school unless there is a major crisis, so principals think evaluation has really no consequences.

Interviewer: And Patrick, do you have anything to add?

Patrick: As Tony has just explained, the multiple priorities confronting principals and the diversity of contexts within which principals work pose challenges to evaluating school leaders and to providing performance bonuses for their work. These challenges highlight the importance of constructing valid and reliable tools for assessing school leaders, as well as the importance of incorporating multiple perspectives on principal performance. Additionally, it is important to

provide feedback, coaching and ongoing professional development to principals to facilitate their growth as school leaders. To create a principal evaluation system that thoughtfully incorporates these dimensions it is essential to purposefully communicate with principals and engage key stakeholders. By drawing on research-based tools, the experiences of other districts who have successfully implemented principal evaluation systems, and focusing the assessment process on immediate and long term school goals, a district can craft a system of principal evaluation and compensation that will benefit principals and ultimately lead to increased student performance.

Interviewer: Can you explain the “Principal Score Card” approach to evaluating principals.

Tony: The main idea behind a Principal Score Card is that there is a chain of causation between principal’s competencies and student outcomes. The principal’s own professional development helps her take appropriate actions or decisions, which in turn influence intermediate outcomes like teacher turnover or the degree of curriculum alignment to state assessments, which in turn influences student achievement. So the scorecard sets goals for development, for behaviors, for intermediate outcomes and for student outcomes.

After developing measures for each level, evaluators and principals agree on goals for each level, and at the end of the evaluation period of the degree of goal attainment is assessed.

And finally, the overall evaluation is a weighted combination of how well goals at each level were met.

Interviewer: Patrick, could give us an idea of some of the innovative ways TIF grantees are evaluating principals?

Patrick: Given the complexities that Tony and I referenced earlier, it is no surprise that there are a diverse array of ways that TIF grantees are evaluating principals. The evaluation dimensions span quite a spectrum and include such measures as:

- Awards based on schoolwide achievement gains of students on standardized tests
- Performance based on administrator evaluations – from multiple perspectives
- A willingness to serve in a high needs school
- Serving as a mentor, coach or provider of professional development
- Ensuring fidelity of performance pay program implementation
- Administering processes that facilitate data-based decision making for teachers as they set growth targets for their students

The key to all of these dimensions is that there is a clear line of sight between the principal leadership activities and increases in teacher quality and student performance. While the specific manner in which this is assessed varies widely across the TIF sites, these core purposes are at the heart of grantee approaches to evaluating school leaders.

Interviewer: Tony and Patrick, thanks so much for joining me today.

Tony: It was a pleasure to be here Courtney.

Patrick: Thank you Courtney.

Interviewer: More information about principal evaluation and the Score Card approach are available in the full presentation. You can find the PowerPoint presentation from their session on the CECR website under the Events section. Patrick also coauthored the *Guide to Implementation* module “Principal Compensation and Performance Incentives” which is also available on cecr.ed.gov. This is Courtney Rowland with CECR and I’ve been joined by Tony Milanowski and Patrick Schuermann today to discuss Principal Evaluation.